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The Conservation Fund Receives Two USDA Awards To Protect Strategically Located Agricultural Regions In Illinois And Alaska

**Media Statement by Larry Selzer, President & CEO,
The Conservation Fund**

“Now more than ever, American’s farmlands and ranchlands play an integral role in feeding our families while providing important habitat for a wide array of wildlife. The best managed agricultural lands also help to improve local water and soil quality and serve as vital community resources. Conserving critical farmland and making it available to the next generation supports entrepreneurial farmers that want to supply the growing demand for sustainably produced, locally sourced foods.

“The Conservation Fund commends the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for its innovative approach to conservation via the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). We are honored to be the lead organization on two Fiscal Year 2019 RCPP awards that will advance longstanding conservation goals in Illinois and Alaska while achieving economic benefits for the regions.

“Partnerships leverage better results and make conservation work for America, including these projects that involve active agricultural lands, support local jobs, and protect natural resources. The Fund celebrates these two new NRCS RCPP partnerships for our

organization in each of these states and looks forward to making a difference on the ground.

“We appreciate the leadership of the U.S. Congress, who reauthorized this instrumental program in the Farm Bill of 2018 and provided subsequent appropriations. Matched with non-federal contributions, these RCPP awards will accelerate local conservation solutions and benefit current and future generations of Americans.”

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

ILLINOIS – Illinois Working Lands, Water and Wildlife Conservation Partnership, \$8,018,453

The Illinois Working Lands, Water and Wildlife Partnership is a new alliance formed to accelerate the pace of working land conservation in Illinois, a state with some of the highest density farmland and most productive soils, but facing major threats of farmland conversion and dramatic need for water quality and habitat solutions. Through bringing experts together and leveraging funds, the group will make an impact in preserving working farmland, improving impaired water quality due to nutrient loss, increasing critical wildlife habitat, supporting access to farmland for next generation farmers, and offering succession opportunities for Illinois’ retiring farmers. The partnership aims to raise additional private and public funding to leverage this award to support farm economic resiliency with willing landowners and producers while providing benefits to Illinois water and lands.

ALASKA – Tanana River Watershed RCPP, \$1,298,701

The Tanana River Watershed RCPP leverages funding from the U.S. Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program to maintain important working lands and open space near Fairbanks, Alaska. This new multi-agency partnership supports the mission of Eielson Airforce Base and achieves long-term watershed protection goals. By implementing conservation easements with willing landowners, the project will complement recently completed watershed action plans, support state-wide and local food security, and limit impacts to soil and water quality.

About The Conservation Fund

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect over 8 million acres of land, including farmland and forestland. The Conservation Fund works with agency, business and nonprofit partners across the nation to implement successful conservation solutions, and we stand ready to implement these proposals.

About the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. By leveraging collective resources and collaborating on common goals, RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation. In Fiscal Year 2019, NRCS is investing \$206 million in 48 partner-driven conservation projects across 29 states through RCPP. Partners are making nearly \$300 million in contributions. For more information:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/rcpp/>

Contact

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Grain and flower farm outside Peoria, Illinois. Photo by Emy Brawley

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